DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 466 JC 900 316

AUTHOR Bishop, Philip E.
TITLE Defining Expectations: The Essay Test Made Simpler.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Successful College Teaching (Orlando, FL, February 23-March 3, 1990).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Essay Tests; *Grading; *Holistic Evaluation; Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; Writing Evaluation; Writing Instruction; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Impromptu writing on tests is a useful way to evaluate student comprehension and encourage students to use critical thinking skills. Students' performance on essay tests can improve, and teachers' time required for grading can decrease through the use of an adapted holistic grading scale that clearly states expectations. First, a carefully written essay question clearly enumerates a number of sub-topics and provides cues for specific supporting information. The question suggests an organizational structure and recommends a selection of examples and details, making the essay questions easier for students to respond to completely and in an organized manner. Second, a grading scale keyed to the question permits grading to be completed quickly and consistently. The scale identifies the characteristics of student essays that should be assigned a range of scores. For example, a student will earn top points on an essay that clearly states a position, is generally well-organized, is generally free of factual and writing errors, and completes the specific tasks assigned in the essay (e.g., identifies three aspects of the Renaissance and causally relates them to a reaction or result in the Reformation). Sample test questions, grading scales, and student essays are provided. (WJT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED319466

Defining Expectations: The Essay Test Made Simpler.

by

Philip E. Bishop

Valencia Community College

JC 900 316

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P. Bishop

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DEFINING EXPECTATIONS:
THE ESSAY TEST MADE SIMPLER

Philip E. Bishop
Valencia Community College

WHY NOT HAVE STUDENTS WRITE TEST ESSAYS?

>Instructor time for grading
>Class time required for writing
>Poor quality of student writing

WHY HAVE STUDENTS WRITE TEST ESSAYS?

>Understanding: students study better for an essay test
>Evaluation: monitor basic comprehension
monitor ability to apply, synthesize, contextualize
>Enrichment: encourage higher level thinking skills through analysis, judgment, valuing

DEFINING EXPECTATIONS

>Use "writable" test questions
--enumerated sub-topics
--implied organization
--cues for selection of details
>Use descriptive grading scale keyed to test question

DEMONSTRATION QUESTION: Renaissance and Reformation

>Requires high-level thinking skills (contextual knowledge)
>Invites application of knowledge from different fields (art, religion, history of technology, politics)
>Connected to major topics of discussion
>Implies organization and selection of supporting detail

TEACHING AROUND THE TEST QUESTION

>Pre-teach essay questions:
--embed test questions in discussion
--announce test questions prior to test
>Instruct students to re-read question while writing
>Read and explain grading scale when returning test
>Allow re-tests

Philip E. Bishop
Humanities
Valencia Community College
Orlando, FL 32802

Defining Expectations:
The Essay Test Made Simpler

A presentation for the National Conference on Successful College Teaching, Orlando, Florida, February 28-March 3, 1990.

Rationale

With the emphasis on writing in college classes, especially in the humanities and social sciences, the essay test is being used as widely as ever to evaluate student knowledge and achievement. Impromptu writing on tests is a useful way of evaluating student comprehension and encouraging students to use critical thinking skills. Yet, for instructors, the grading of student test essays is time-consuming and often arbitrary in setting the standards of achievement. Students suffer, too. In preparing for the test students may have only a foggy notion of what to expect in essay questions; with the test result in hand, students may still have little idea why they scored what they did or how they might have done better. I try to solve my problem and my students' by using an adapted holistic grading scale that states clearly my expectations of an test essay and permits me to grade more quickly and consistently.

Method

My grading technique adapts the holistic scoring method used in grading large numbers of essays with trained graders. In my adaptation, the test essay questions are keyed closely to the content area (humanities) and the grading scales are more content-specific. My adapted system has two parts (see examples in the attachments):

1) a carefully written essay question that clearly enumerates a number of sub-topics and provides cues for specific supporting information;
2) a descriptive grading scale keyed to the question, with clearly defined "rubrics" into which most test essays can confidently be placed on one quick reading.

In my experience this system has two advantages: the test questions themselves are more "writable" for students, because **the question implies an organization and a selection of supporting examples and details.** Hence student answers tend to be better organized and developed than otherwise. Second, the grading scale enforces the instructor's expectations in the assessing the essay. Grading can be done more quickly and consistently when the grader can expect an organizational scheme and can count the enumerated sub-topics (e.g., three examples of ancient Greek sculpture, two major causes of the Protestant Reformation). Using the rubric scale, the grader can usually place an answer immediately into one descriptive category and

determine the final score quickly. Students and instructor all benefit when the **test questions and grading are explicit in stating the instructor's expectation of student writers.**

Implications for Instruction

First, an explanation of how I actually teach with this technique: I always **give students possible test questions before the test.** This focuses their study on a few synthetic questions and encourages them to re-study specific topics in this content. During the test I **instruct students to re-read the test question** several times while writing. This encourages them to answer the question directly and to respond to its cues. When returning the tests I **read and explain the scoring rubric**, and sometimes read a sample answer. This de-mystifies the scoring process and provides students with the grounds to challenge an incorrect score. Finally, students who have not achieved a minimum score are **allowed to re-test** on the same question. Teaching around the test questions like this elicits learning strategies and skills appropriate to the task and gives students specific feedback about their writing and their comprehension of the course content. By making the testing process overt and explicit, I **increase students' chance for success** on the test, in this course and in other courses.

Making the test essay simpler means that the test question itself can be more complex. That is, "writable" test questions keyed to a rubric scale can challenge students to apply critical

thinking skills on a test, where they can see and benefit from the results. Students can be challenged to synthesize, judge, apply content knowledge, contrast, trace processes over time, predict, argue for or against. Given the specific prompts of a test question, students are challenged to use criteria and supporting evidence appropriate to the context of the course and the discipline. **The more support I give to students in teaching around the test essay, the more I can challenge them to do in writing the test essay, without increasing the difficulty of the test or the course.**

Selected Bibliography

Writing Across the Curriculum

Fulwiler, Toby, and Art Young, eds. Language Connections: Writing and Reading across the Curriculum. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1982.

Maimon, Elaine, and others. Writing in the Arts and Sciences. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1981.

White, Edward M. Teaching and Assessing Writing. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.

Critical Thinking

Belenky, Mary F., and others. Women's Ways of Knowing. New York: Basic, 1986.

Nelson, Craig E. "Skewered on the Unicorn's Horn: The Illusion of Tragic Tradeoff Between Content and Critical Thinking in the Teaching of Science." In Linda W. Crow, ed., Enhancing Critical Thinking in the Sciences. Washington, D.C.: Society for College Science Teachers, 1989, 17-27.

Perry, William G. Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

HUM 2232/Bishop
Northern Renaissance Test

Do not write your name here

Essay: Answer one of the following questions in a well-organized essay of 250-400 words. Use paragraphs, including an introduction and conclusion, to show the organization of your ideas. Answer every aspect of the question, referring in detail to material that you have read and discussed in class. Re-read the question occasionally while writing your answer. Write your answer on the front and back of this sheet. The instructor will give you additional paper if necessary.

A. **Argue** either that the Reformation was a reaction against the Renaissance or that the Reformation was a result of the Renaissance. In your answer, **identify** three aspects of the Renaissance and **explain** in detail how the Reformation reacted against or resulted from these three aspects. You may want to consider such topics as: the study of ancient languages; lavish decoration of churches; stress on individualism and freedom; rise of printing; corruption in the Catholic church; etc.

GRADING RUBRIC

36-40
- --Clearly states a position
- --Identifies 3 aspects of Renaissance and causally relates them to reaction or result in Reformation
- --Supports its paragraphs in detail
- --Generally well-organized (including introduction and conclusion) and well-written
- --Generally free of factual and writing errors

30-35
- --Successfully shows causal relation between Ren. and Ref. in two but not three aspects
- --Convincing argument in concept but weak in supporting detail
- --Shows agreement between Ren. and Ref., but not causality
- --Answers in convincing detail but suffers minor problems in organization or style

26-29
- --Discusses either Ren. or Ref., but shows no relation
- --Addresses the question but suffers major problems in organization and style
- --Fails to answer question directly
- --Discusses only Reformation

Note: 1 point may be added for exceptionally original,

6

creative, or well-written answers

HUM 2232/Bishop
Northern Renaissance Test

Do not write your name here

Essay: Answer one of the following questions in a well-organized essay of 250-400 words. Use paragraphs, including an introduction and conclusion, to show the organization of your ideas. Answer every aspect of the question, referring in detail to material that you have read and discussed in class. Re-read the question occasionally while writing your answer. Write your answer on the front and back of this sheet. The instructor will give you additional paper if necessary.

A. **Argue** either that the Reformation was a reaction against the Renaissance or that the Reformation was a result of the Renaissance. In your answer, **identify** three aspects of the Renaissance and **explain** in detail how the Reformation reacted against or resulted from these three aspects. You may want to consider such topics as: the study of ancient languages; lavish decoration of churches; stress on individualism and freedom; rise of printing; corruption in the Catholic church; etc.

Literally, Renaissance means "rebirth." The Renaissance was a period of rebirth in art, in attitude of society, and because of the Reformation, it was also a rebirth of religion. The Reformation was a result of the enlightenment of the Renaissance as shown in Martin Luther's rebellion against the sale of indulgences, scholarly study of ancient languages, and the invention of the printing press.

Martin Luther posted his "95 Theses" on the door of a cathedral in 1517. The nature of the paper angered the Catholic church, and Luther was later excommunicated and declared an outlaw. Luther was influenced by corruption in the Catholic church. Sales of indulgences, a common practice, enabled sinners to buy a pardon for themselves or dead relatives for a sizable amount of money. Martin Luther was so outraged, he posted his work and his supporters joined him in the formation of the Protestant religion. The Reformation or split in the church, was a result of Luther's enlightenment of society to the corruption in the church.

One important feature of the Renaissance was the study of ancient languages. Humanists and Protestants both believed knowledge of the Bible was an assest, and it should be studied in its original vernacular of Greek and Hebrew. Martin Luther used this ability to translate the bible into common German for all to read

and study. This also helped to further the popularity of the Reformation.

Martin Luther's "95 Theses" spread quickly throughout Europe as a result of the printing press. The Printing press was a Renaissance invention, symbolic of the enlightenment of man and rebirth of literature. Because of the movable type, books and pamphlets could be printed quickly. Martin Luther's Bible could be printed faster and it would allow more people to read the book for themselves instead of relying on a clergyman to translate it. This supported theories of the Protestant religion and helped the Reformation grow successfully.

Martin Luther has shown us the Reformation was a result of the Renaissance through his "95 Theses," study of German, Greek, and Hebrew, and his use of the printing press. The Renaissance was an enlightenment of mankind, and the Reformation can be looked at as the enlightenment or rebirth of religion. The Reformation was also an inspiration for individuals to seek their own enlightenment.

HUM 2232/Bishop
Northern Renaissance Test

Do not write your name here

Essay: Answer one of the following questions in a well-organized essay of 250-400 words. Use paragraphs, including an introduction and conclusion, to show the organization of your ideas. Answer every aspect of the question, referring in detail to material that you have read and discussed in class. Re-read the question occasionally while writing your answer. Write your answer on the front and back of this sheet. The instructor will give you additional paper if necessary.

A. **Argue** either that the Reformation was a reaction against the Renaissance or that the Reformation was a result of the Renaissance. In your answer, **identify** three aspects of the Renaissance and **explain** in detail how the Reformation reacted against or resulted from these three aspects. You may want to consider such topics as: the study of ancient languages; lavish decoration of churches; stress on individualism and freedom; rise of printing; corruption in the Catholic church; etc.

The events that occured during the 16th century Reformation, when analysed with the Renaissance of Europe in mind, can be thought of as a result of the changes and new ideals of the Renaissance. Humanist beliefs as well as those of Reformers, share many common veiws. Both were concerned with the corruption and demise of the Catholic Church. Reformers, as well as humanists, held an interest in classical learning of ancient languages which can attribute to the need to translate ancient texts into a vernacular.

The Renaissance in Europe led to an inflated interest in knowledge of commoners as well as intellectuals. More and more people were becoming literate. As a Result of Martin Luther's 95 thesis, and the invention of the printing press, the general public was growing wise to the corruption and illiteracy of the papal court. From this outrage came the need for reform in the church.

Another factor that contributed to the reform was the hummanist desire to learn ancient Language. Humanists of the Renaissance studied Greek as well as Latin and Hebrew. Martin Luther felt that the Catholic Bible, currently used by the church, was not the original intention of the text. He then went to the translations of classical learning and translated his own version in German. His sources were translated from Hebrew, Greek, Latin and other languages refined

10

in the Renaissance.

Had it not been for the hummanist's desire to learn the ancient languages, Martin Luther would not have been able to translate the bible from the original text. Therefore the reformation might not have taken the cause it did from this veiwpoint, one can say that the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century was a result of the Renaissance in Europe.

Philip E. Bishop
Humanities
Valencia Community College
Orlando, FL 32802

SAMPLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Some historians see the late Middle Ages as a time of "awakening," in preparation for the Renaissance; others see it as the "climax" of rich and varied medieval culture.

Select two major works or figures from the late Middle Ages (e.g., Dante, Giotto, Aquinas, Machaut, Petrarch, Chaucer) and **discuss** how their work represents either an awakening (of the coming Renaissance) or an climax (of the medieval past). For each example **demonstrate** how the styles and ideas of this work or figure anticipate the future or culminate the past.

2. **Compare and contrast** the God of the Hebrews and the God of Jesus, as illustrated in the creation stories, the Book of Job, and the teachings of Jesus. Be sure to **identify** both similarities and differences between the two concepts of God, and refer specifically to the biblical texts.

3. **Illustrate** the principle of utilitarianism in Roman architecture by discussing three Roman structures in detail. In your answer **refer** to these architectural ideas: emphasis on verticality; building of significant interiors; development of the arch.

4. **Define** "classical humanism" and **illustrate** this concept by describing in detail the construction and decoration of the Parthenon. In your answer relate the Parthenon's details clearly to the concept of classical humanism and refer to arete (excellence) and sophrosyne (balance).

5. **Trace the development** of Greek sculpture from the archaic through the classical to the Hellenistic ages. In your answer **discuss** in detail at least one example of each age, and **explain** how each style changed to produce the next. Finally, explain which style you prefer personally and why.

ERIC Clearinghouse for
Junior Colleges JUL 19 1990